



With so many people staying at home, it's an excellent time for reading...

VIKINGS IN 'LOCK DOWN'

Think of Vikings and you think of warriors charging into battle, but it's difficult to fight successfully in the dark. Scandinavian winters are long, dark and cold, there was little travel and people only went outside when it was essential. Stuck inside their longhouses the Vikings enjoyed playing games and viewed them as strategic training for raids. Page 23 of *Things to do with Vikings* explains: 'Board games were particularly popular, and skilled players were highly respected. Vikings played several board games including a form of backgammon (*kvatruþafl*), fox and geese (*halatafl*) and chess (*skáktafl*). The most popular Viking board game, however, was *hnefatafl*, which probably means 'king's board' and is often called the Game of Kings. *Hnefa* means 'fist' but it usually understood to mean the most important piece, i.e. the king, and *tafl* is table or board.'



The Lewis chessmen in the British Museum, London. Some people think that they are really pieces from the Viking Game of Kings

The 'new normal'?

Millions of people have been affected by the pandemic, but we should be thankful that it hasn't been worse. Adelaide Lubbock helped out with refugees, or 'displaced persons' as they were called, at the end of the Second World War. Page 41 of her book *A Cog in the Wheel* says: 'They are pouring in at the moment by truck and on foot, and there are no rations, water, accommodation, latrines, medical supplies, no anything, as everyone has pulled out and gone forward.'

'I went round the camp just now and really the conditions are very bad. Six filthy exhausted refugees were sleeping in the *ambulatorio* (a small tent used as a sickbay), and the Italian *sorella* [sister; either nurse or nun] was going round jabbing people with some sort of inoculation – what, I can't imagine – without attempting to sterilise or change the needle. No one seemed to be controlling her, and there is no doctor in charge. The camp is littered already with mess and filth, and groups of refugees hang about in disconsolate bunches. Most of these people are Italian forced workers, and some Italian soldiers, but there is a sprinkling of Poles, Yugoslavs, Russians, French, and one American citizen, or so he claims. As far as I can see, none of these people has been through any kind of security screening, and we only have their word for what they say they are.'

PHONE FOIBLES

As our retail customers have been closed we've been relying on our online shop for most sales. It's caused some hilarity though. Email/phone enquiries have included: 'I'd like to order *The Oxford Book of Prayer*' (wrong publisher); 'Do you still do takeaways?' (wrong number); 'Please send 150 facemasks.' (er...?); 'I'm next door, do you know you have sheep on your drive?' (help!); 'May I pick up my dry cleaning?' (another wrong number); 'I'd like to order two copies of *Stops along the Manx Electric Railway*' (hurray!).

Managing change

Like most businesses, Loaghtan Books has suffered a severe downturn in trade. We've also been unable to complete (yet) the book we were working on when everything paused: *Peel: Past & Present*, a sister volume to *Port Erin: Past & Present*. In fact we have several half-finished books awaiting the time when we can take the photographs or conduct the interviews or do whatever is needed to finish them.

But we're still here. We're still in business. And we're determined that no pestilential virus is going to keep us from publishing.

Keep well, Sara

Quote of the day

Another similarity between some Manx crosses and some Pictish ones occurs in the depiction of St Paul of Thebes and St Anthony the Great. The Manx version can be found in the Maughold cross house while the Pictish version is housed in the church at Fowlis Wester, a small village in Perth and Kinross, Scotland. Page 28, *Cross Purposes*